



NEGOTIATING WORKING ENGAGEMENTS

A professional framework

‘TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT’ JOB OFFERS HURT EVERYONE – EVEN EMPLOYERS

When you work as a freelancer, you are not always working with engagers who will protect the craft-skills in your sector. Often, they think that they have a short-term need for some skills and your time – and that’s all!

Even though an employer may think it’s in their interests to make ‘take it or leave it’ job offers, if you don’t negotiate your rates and terms well, their industry will fail to attract, develop and retain the skills that they need. As we’ve seen in recent years, people leave industries when the bargaining relationship is one-sided. If your profession is to be sustainable, sometimes, it’s up to you to make sure that you get the skills and experience that you need.

If you can’t earn enough doing the work you love, at some point, you will need to go somewhere else to find a job that will offer a reasonable standard of living and security for your family. That would be a waste of all of the investment that you have put into your professional skills – and it would also be a loss to your industry!

GET THIS RIGHT AND ENJOY A BETTER LIFE

It is not enough to just be good at what you do. If you are to enjoy your working life, you need to be able to do more of the kind of work that suits you, and less of the stuff that doesn’t.

- You won’t develop your skills if you always take the first job that is offered to you – every new job could be a stepping stone.
- You won’t grow your income if you don’t have a plan to improve your rates of pay.
- You will soon want to leave an industry that doesn’t respect you, your skills and your time.

DEALING WELL WITH OFFERS OF WORK IS A SKILL THAT YOU CAN LEARN

We all know that hard work and competence aren’t the only things that determine whether you will succeed or not. When someone offers you work, they are not doing you a favour.

BEFORE YOU EVEN TALK ABOUT MONEY...

Reputations are important – a well-paid job that sets you up to fail will cost you more than it pays. Long working hours without reasonable breaks will damage your performance. You need time to think and plan to avoid costly mistakes. Everything we know about productivity tells us that skilled workers need to be rested and alert.

Employers are asking you to partner them in a transaction, and you need to know what your priorities are before you decide.

- Is it the kind of work you should be looking for? Will get you other jobs, or new connections?
- Will you develop or practice new skills that can improve your CV?
- Will you be able to do a good job?
 - Will you be provided with the right equipment? Or will you need to bring your own?
 - Who will you be working with? Do you know them? Are you confident that you will work well together?

THEN THERE’S YOUR WELFARE

If your day is long and exhausting, you won’t be able to do a good job for other clients on subsequent days.

- Your time is valuable. Will you be able to stay rested and refreshed while you work?
- How long is your working day going to be?
- What time will you be able to leave work so that you can rest in preparation for the following day (whoever you are working for on that day)?
- Are you going to have to spend too long travelling to and from the job? Is accommodation an option?
- What about meals?

AND THEN, FINALLY, THERE'S THE MONEY

- If you work for them on a particular day, you often can't work for anyone else – so you are giving up potential earnings from elsewhere.
- What is...
 - your target rate of pay for a working day? (Your "asking rate")
 - the rate that you generally expect to earn? (Your "going rate")
 - the minimum rate any self-respecting pro should expect? (Your "minimum professional rate")
- What overtime rate will be paid if you must work for longer than your standard day?
- Is your engager going to pay you to bring your equipment, or cover your costs when providing it?
- Will your engager be covering the cost of travel and/or accommodation where it is needed?

TIPS

- **Produce a profile of yourself** to show on a personal website, LinkedIn or other social media tools.
- **Use your profile to be assertive:** Don't just list your skills and experience. Be clear about what kind of work you are looking for – what experiences and stepping stones you are planning for next. This will show that you are serious about your profession – it's a selling point
- **Promote yourself widely** – you can be the best negotiator in the world, but if you only have one offer on the table, you are more likely to have to take-it-or-leave-it. Find any industry directories and make sure you have an entry in them. Take any networking opportunities you can. Join online groups, get on the phone and make introductions.
- **Prepare for job offers** – be clear that each call is not a formality – it's a negotiation. Be polite but firm. You are deciding whether to take a job and you have other options.
- **Have a checklist of questions** that you plan to ask – before you talk about money
- **Be in control of the conversation** – if possible, ask to call back when you're ready and have your laptop open or your checklist to hand. This is the most important task in the next job you are going to do – make sure you're ready and focussed.
- **Your checklist should include:**
 - **Dates the work is expected** (if you are considering other offers on those dates, be clear about it)
 - Include important elements here – how much 'prep' is expected?
 - **What will the job title and credit be?**
 - **Where the work will be** – in this conversation, you should say how long it will take you to get there and back, and how you will do it.
 - **What the working day looks like.**
 - Will it be 'continuous' or do you expect breaks (days without breaks should either be shorter or better paid)
 - **What equipment is needed** – and do they want it included in the rate or billed separately?
 - This includes phones, laptops etc
 - **Vehicle terms** – will they be paying mileage? Or fuel receipts? Or will they be hiring / providing a vehicle for you?
 - **Other terms**
 - Travel, accommodation, 'Per Diem' payments, Payment terms (7 days, 14 days, etc)
 - What your contractual notice period will be?